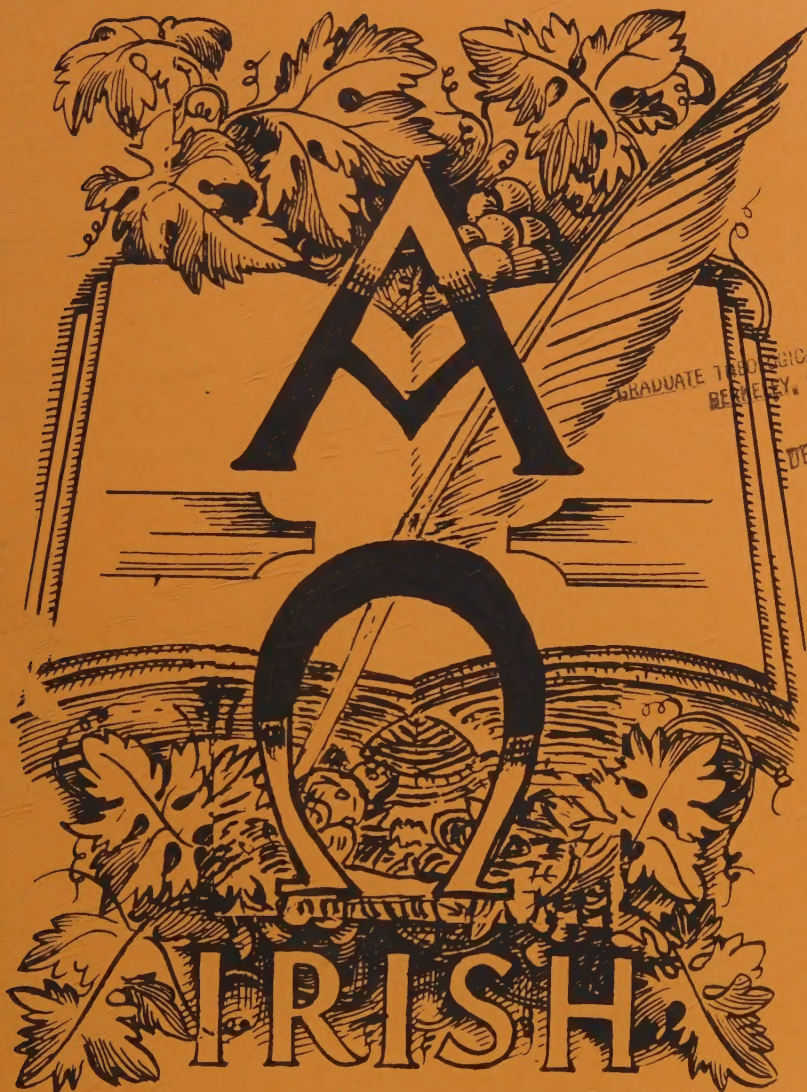


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The Son of Man

J.M.Ross

So much has been written about the Son of Man problem in the last hundred years that anyone who took the trouble to read all the literature would have no time for anything else. The present article has been written in the conviction that much of this writing is based on assumptions that will not stand up to careful examination, and that what Jesus meant by calling himself the Son of Man can be simplified by eliminating a number of unprofitable lines of inquiry. Four theses will be propounded and defended in order to fix the lines within which any solution of the problem is to be found. In a fifth section some attempt will be made to discover what Jesus meant by the expression.

I. Jesus did call himself "the Son of Man".

It has been argued that Jesus could not have so described himself. The following grounds have been given for this contention:-

- (a) He did not regard himself as Messiah or having any special status.
- (b) In the earliest strata of the gospel tradition references to the Son of Man and the Kingdom of God are never found together on Jesus' lips; but he did proclaim the Kingdom of God; therefore he cannot have called himself the Son of Man.
- (c) The title Son of Man was not in current use; therefore Jesus would not have used it.
- (d) Some texts imply that the Son of Man is a different person from the speaker (especially Mark 8:38 = Luke 9:26, Mark 14:62 and parallels, Luke 12:8-9); these alone are authentic sayings of Jesus.
- (e) There is an observable tendency in Matthew and Luke to add "the Son of Man" to sayings which lack the expression in Mark; e.g. "Whom do people say that I am" in Mark 8:27 becomes in Matt. 16:13 "Whom do people say the Son of Man is?". If Mark applied the same method to his sources we get back to a time when none of the reports of Jesus' teaching contained the expression Son of Man.

These arguments will not bear the weight that has been put on them.

- (a) Jesus may not have publicly claimed to be the Messiah, but according to Matt 16:17 he accepted the title when given to him by Peter, and according to Mark 14:62 he did the like when challenged by the High Priest. In any case, unless the synoptic gospels are quite untrustworthy he did repeatedly claim a special status for himself, even though he did not define what that

status was. He claimed a greater authority than Moses - "But I say to you..." (Matt. 5:22, etc.). At Mark 2:25-28 he claimed authority over the Sabbath. His recorded words abound in such claims as, "A greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42), "Come to me and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28), "If I by the finger of God cast out demons..." (Luke 11:20), "Whoever denies me before men I will deny before my Father in heaven" (Matt.10:38), "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). There is no inherent reason why Jesus should not have given himself this special title.

(b) This is not a decisive argument. It is not certain what are "the earliest strata of the gospel tradition". It was not necessary for Jesus to allude to the Son of Man when talking about the Kingdom, or vice versa, but the two are found fairly close together at Mark 8:38 and 9:1, Luke 21:27 and 31, and Luke 17:20-23. There are signs that Jesus preferred to talk about the Kingdom to the crowds and The Son of Man to the disciples; for instance at Luke 17:20 Jesus said to the Pharisees that the Kingdom does not come with observation, and immediately added to the disciples that the time would come when they would desire one of the days of the Son of Man and not see it.

(c) Let it be granted, as will be maintained under Thesis III below, that the title "Son of Man" was not in current use. But that is no reason to deny that Jesus used it. On the contrary, as will be maintained in section V, he may well have used it for the very reason that it was not in current use.

(d) If some texts appear to distinguish Jesus from the Son of Man, others, such as Mark 10:33 and parallels ("We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man is going to be delivered up to the high priests...") clearly identify them. How can we be sure which are authentic? But Mark 8:38 and Luke 12:8-9 do not necessarily imply that the Son of Man is different from Jesus. A headmaster can say on Friday "If anyone misbehaves at the party tomorrow the Headmaster will have something to say to him on Monday."

(e) It is by no means certain that the evangelists always tended to add "the Son of Man" to sources which did not contain it; the process is sometimes in the other direction. For instance Matthew at 10:32-33 has "I" in his version of a saying which in Q (as quoted in Luke 12:8-9) probably included "the Son of Man" as does Mark's version at 8:38. Even if there was a tendency to insert "the Son of Man" into traditional sayings of Jesus, this was because of a tradition that Jesus had called himself the Son of Man; it does not follow that that tradition had no foundation in fact.

Not only is there little substance in the arguments for supposing that Jesus did not call himself the Son of Man; there are weighty reasons against

the term having been invented in the church and inserted into the tradition of what Jesus said.

(1) It is a striking fact that Jesus is never referred to as the Son of Man outside the Gospels. Acts 7:56 is no exception to this statement. Although most manuscripts say that Stephen claimed to see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, it is unlikely that a Hellenist such as Stephen would have used so Aramaic an expression as the Son of Man, and even less likely that Luke, who throughout his Gospel was careful never to use the expression except on the lips of Jesus himself, would have attributed it to Stephen. We may therefore confidently accept the variant reading "Son of Man" from p⁷⁴ and one or two other sources. If υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ was what Luke wrote, early copyists would have been strongly tempted to alter θεοῦ to ἀνθρώπου, both on stylistic grounds, to avoid the repetition of θεοῦ within the same sentence, and by attraction to Luke 22:69 ("from henceforth the Son of Man will be sitting at the right hand of the power of God"). If on the other hand ἀνθρώπου was original, there would be no motive for alteration to the awkward θεοῦ.

At first sight it might appear that the writer to the Hebrews in 2:5-9 understood the words υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου in Psalm 8:5 to refer to Jesus as the Son of Man, but a more careful exegesis makes this unlikely. The author is arguing that the world is made subject not to angels but to Christ; admittedly, he says, according to Psalm 8 the world is declared to be subject to humanity, whom God has crowned with glory and honour, subjecting all things under its feet; but at present we do not see all things subject to humanity: all we see is Jesus who (with a slight twist of the words of the Psalm) was made for a short while lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour. Here Jesus is not identified with the "Son of Man" in verse 5 of the Psalm but is only declared the recipient of the honour foretold in verse 7. Had the writer thought of Jesus as the Son of Man he could have made his point more effectively by inserting τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου after Ἰησοῦν in verse 9. But he did not do so; evidently he was not interested in Jesus as the Son of Man, if indeed he knew of this title at all.

At 1 Cor 15:27 Paul quotes Psalm 8 with reference not to humanity but to Christ, but seems uninterested in, or unacquainted with, the title Son of Man; otherwise he would have added τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου after πῶς in verse 25. The same is true of Eph.1:22. Jeremias (New Testament Theology I.265) thought that Paul knew of the title but deliberately avoided it; it is however equally likely that Paul was unaware of it. he seems to have known very little of the details of Jesus' life and teaching.

By the time the Pastoral Epistles were written the synoptic gospels were beginning to become known, and 1 Tim 2:5-6 ("the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all") seems to allude to Mark 10:45 or its parallel Matt 20:28, but in the quotation "the Son of Man" becomes "the man Christ Jesus". Even when "the Son of Man" is staring the writer in the face in the Gospel, he declines to use the expression because it is not part of the language of the Church.

Did the writer of the Apocalypse know of Jesus as the Son of Man? Apparently not. Rev 1:13 describes a vision of Christ as ὁμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου ("like a human being") not as τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ("the Son of Man"). The phrase is not a direct quotation from anywhere; it is reminiscent of the heavenly personage ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ("in human likeness") of Dan.7:13; the description of Christ, also borrowed from Daniel, does not relate to that personage but is taken partly from the description of the Ancient of days in 7:9 and partly from a different personage in 10:5-6. A subordinate angelic being ὁμοιος υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου appears in Rev.14:14. It would seem that the author of the Apocalypse was unaware of Jesus' title The Son of Man, but took his description of him from the Book of Daniel. (Whether Jesus himself derived his title from Daniel will be discussed under Thesis IV below.)

From these cases it would seem that until the Gospels were known in the Church the title Son of Man was not only not used: it was not even known.

(2) Even in the Gospels, the expression "the Son of Man" never occurs except on the lips of Jesus. (John 12:34 is no real exception: the crowd who asked "Who is this Son of Man?" were only repeating Jesus' own words, recorded e.g. at verse 23.) There must therefore have been an early tradition that Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man, even if he was not called that either by his contemporaries or by the subsequent Church. This is no doubt the reason why Matthew and Luke sometimes inserted a reference to the Son of Man when reproducing a saying of Jesus from Mark. Examples can be found at Matt. 16:13 (compare Mark 8:27), Matt. 16:28 (compare Mark 9:1) and Luke 12:8 (compare Mark 10:32). Similarly in the sayings of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, even if these are not his *ipsissima verba*, he refers to himself as the Son of Man at important points.

(3) The Son of man is a perfect case of the "principle of dissimilarity" under which sayings attributed to Jesus should not be regarded as authentic if they were in current use in pre-Christian Judaism or in the subsequent Church.

The Son of Man fulfils neither condition (see also under Thesis II below.)¹

The idea that the Church took up the title Son of Man from some other source than Jesus, inserted it into the primitive tradition in many different contexts, and then completely dropped it, is an improbability unsupported by evidence. The improbability is not lessened when it is supposed that the title was invented by the early Palestinian church but not used elsewhere. However plausible may be the argument in individual cases that the title was not used by Jesus himself, something has gone wrong when doubt extends to all cases, because of the difficulty of otherwise accounting for the extensive occurrence of the title in the gospel tradition.

II. Jesus used "the Son of Man" as a meaningful self-designation.

It has been contended by several recent writers² that though Jesus did sometimes call himself "son of man" this was in the Aramaic form bar-nasha or bar-enash, which could be no more than a polite and self-deprecatory circumlocution for the first personal pronoun - "this person, meaning "I". Or the expression could mean "a man" or "someone". Thus what Jesus originally said at Matt.8:20 (Luke 9:58) was "Foxes have holes... but a certain man has nowhere to lay his head." The saying recorded at Matt 11:19 (Luke 12:10) was "John came neither eating nor drinking... but someone else has come eating and drinking, and they say 'Behold a glutton'..." Luke 11:30 was

¹ Cf F.F. Bruce, The Time is Fulfilled (1978) 27. Just occasionally in the early church Jesus was referred to as the Son of Man. Hegesippus in his legendary account of the martyrdom of James (Eusebius, Hist Eccl. ii.23.9) makes James ask, "Why do you ask me about Jesus the Son of Man", and in the Gospel according to the Hebrews (as quoted by Jerome, De Vir. III.2) the risen Jesus broke bread and gave it to James the Just saying, "My brother, eat your bread, for the Son of Man has arisen from those who sleep." These passages show no more than that second-century Christian authors were acquainted with the Gospels.

² Principally G. Vermes in an appendix to M.Black, An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels, (Third Edition, 1967) and pp. 160-66 of his Jesus the Jew, (1973); Maurice Casey in chapter 9 of Son of Man (SPCK, 1979); and Barnabas Lindars in Jesus Son of Man (SPCK, 1983). Grave doubts had however already been cast on any such explanation by F.H.Borsch in The Son of Man in Myth and History (1967) 22-24, 315.

originally "As Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will a man (i.e. myself) be to this generation." Similarly Mark 9:31 was "A man will be delivered up..."; 14:21 was "A man goes according to his destiny"; 10:45 "A man has come to give his life for many." Only sayings that fit this hypothesis are authentic. But when the Aramaic was translated into Greek, the Greek-speaking Christians thought that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου must have a deeper meaning, and especially by comparison with the similar expression in the Greek of Daniel 7:13, that it had an apocalyptic reference. Consequently they inserted "the Son of Man" into sayings (especially apocalyptic sayings) which did not originally contain it.

There are several considerations which cast serious doubt on this theory.

(1) Aramaic experts are not agreed on the precise meaning of bar-nasha. Did it mean "this person" or "a certain person" or "a man" or "someone"? Nor is it certain which of these meanings were current in the first century³.

(2) The theory is able to use only those sayings which can be made to fit it; the remainder are dismissed as inauthentic. The theory would be more convincing if the authenticity of the accepted sayings could first be decided on other grounds: otherwise the argument is circular.

(3) Whichever meaning of bar-nasha is selected, it does not correspond with the Greek. We have the Gospels only in Greek, not Aramaic. The Greek for the various interpretations put upon bar-nasha would be not ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου but ὁ ἀνθρώπος οὗτός (this person) or ἀνθρώπος (a man) or τις or ἀνθρώπος τις (someone). The addition of the definite article to "son of man" means that the people who translated bar-nasha into Greek had a different conception of its meaning. (The translation must have been made very early by word of mouth, probably in Jesus' life time on earth.)

Either Jesus did call himself bar-nasha and its earliest interpreters mistook its meaning, or the Greek is an accurate translation of what Jesus meant by whatever was the Aramaic original. Is it likely that in the bilingual land of first-century Palestine the earliest interpreters of Jesus were so seriously

³ J.Jeremias in his New Testament Theology I.261, note 1, gives reasons for denying that bar-nasha was ever used, as has often been supposed, as a periphrasis for "I".

mistaken?⁴

(4) This last point can be taken further. It is almost certain that Jesus had some knowledge of Greek. For centuries Greek had been invading Palestine and by the first century A.D. it was the normal language of commerce and government. Jesus did not come from the lowest stratum of society but was well read in the scriptures and was brought up as a skilled craftsman. According to Mark 2:15 he had the use of a house in Capernaum in which he was able to entertain a sizable company. His parables show that he was familiar with the business of trade and government. Several of his disciples (Andrew, Simon, Philip, Thomas) had Greek names; the fishermen must have used Greek to sell their fish and Matthew to collect his taxes. According to Mark (7:24-37) Jesus was able to converse with people in the Greek-speaking area of Tyre, Sidon and Decapolis. His trial before Pilate must have been conducted in Greek, and the accounts of it do not reveal any difficulty of communication. It can therefore be safely concluded that while Jesus' public teaching was normally in Aramaic his inner circle of disciples was a bilingual community in which Greek was spoken as well as Aramaic. It is therefore probable that the Greek expression $\delta \text{ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου}$ ("the Son of Man") had Jesus' approval as a translation of whatever was the Aramaic original, if he did not actually coin the Greek expression himself.

(5) The expression is not ordinary Greek. Literally it means not "this person" or "someone" but "the son of the man" or "the son of humanity". It was termed by G. Dupont (Le Fils de l'Homme, Paris, 1924, p.36) as a "monstruosité littéraire". The clumsy literalism must have been designed to convey a meaning out of the ordinary. When the Greek NT was translated into Syriac the Greek was not turned back into bar-nasha but into a more complex expression.

(6) In the NT, with one exception, "son of man" is always preceded by the definite article. It is never so preceded in the LXX (see under Thesis IV below). The one exception is John 5:27 ("He has given the Son authority to deliver judgement, because he is Son of Man"). John seems here to have omitted the article in order to assimilate Jesus' words to Daniel 7: 10, 14 and 22, where "one like a son of man" is the agent of God's judgment.

For all these reasons it seems unlikely that after Jesus had sometimes

⁴ The same objection holds against G. Gerleman's contention that the meaning of Son depends on the meaning of bar in bar-nasha. We have to deal with the Greek, not its hypothetical Aramaic source.

referred to himself in an Aramaic expression which meant no more than "I" or "someone", the expression was quickly turned into unusual Greek which (whatever it meant) could not bear that meaning and (although obscure) was inserted into many other of the reported sayings of the Lord belonging to quite different contexts⁵.

III. The title Son of Man, signifying the Messiah or some other expected deliverer, was not in current use.

It has been asserted that such a title "must have been" in current use, otherwise Jesus would not have claimed it: but there is no solid evidence for this. If there had been a current expectation of a coming Son of Man, surely somewhere in the New Testament there would have been a claim that Jesus fulfilled that expectation. It would have been a powerful argument in debate with Jews to claim that Jesus was the Son of Man whom they were expecting, but nowhere in early Christian literature is this argument to be found. On the contrary, there is evidence in John 9:35-6 and 12:34 that Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man would be likely to seem unintelligible to his contemporaries, or at least that the author of the Fourth Gospel thought so. Moreover it is not necessary to suppose that the title Son of Man was in current use, for Jesus may well have adopted it for the very reason that it was not in current use, so that he could give his own meaning to it.

It is true that a coming Son of Man features in 4 Esdras, but that book is unlikely to have been written before the second century A.D. It is also true that there is much about a future Son of Man in that section of 1 Enoch known as the Similitudes or Parables, but the date of composition of that work is quite uncertain: as likely as not it was written towards the end of the first century A.D.; there are no traces of it in the Qumran library, which preserves or refers to other parts of Enoch.

Nor is it safe to suppose that the references to the Son of Man in 4 Esdras and Enoch derive from pre-Christian Jewish ideas: these writings may equally have borrowed the title from Jesus' use of it.

Another late reference is in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho 32:1 where Trypho says, "These and similar passages of scripture compel us to await one who is glorious and great and who receives the everlasting kingdom from the Ancient of Days as son of man; but this your so-called Christ is without

⁵ Cf. Morna Hooker in Text and Interpretation (Essays presented to Matthew Black, ed. Ernest Best and R. McL Wilson, 1979), 157.

honour or glory... for he was crucified." This shows that in certain Jewish circles in the second century A.D. the Messiah was identified with the heavenly personage "like a son of man" mentioned in Daniel 7:13. It does not follow that this identification was current in the early first century.

Even if it should be discovered that someone before Jesus had identified Daniel's figure with the Messiah, it would still be unlikely that Jesus, a Galilean carpenter, would have known of it, even less that anyone hearing him calling himself the Son of Man would have understood the allusion. Strack and Billerbeck (Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash I. 486, 959), after quoting various rabbinic references, concluded that it cannot be said that in Jesus' time the name "Son of Man" was a customary designation of the Messiah.

There is some reason to suppose that before Jesus' time the Messiah was sometimes referred to as "The Man". But if this is where Jesus took his title from, why did he alter it to "Son of Man"? The natural answer is that "The Man" had Messianic connotations, and Jesus wishing to avoid such connotations in his public teaching chose a neutral title. B. Westcott, in his judicious excursus on the Son of Man at the end of Chap. I of his commentary on St. John's gospel said, "It is inconceivable that the Lord should have adopted a title which was popularly held to be synonymous with that of Messiah, while he carefully avoided the title of Messiah himself."

IV. Jesus did not derive either the title or its meaning from any previous source: it was his original creation.

The sacred scriptures known to Jesus contain four uses of "son of man" which might conceivably have given rise to Jesus' title. (We do not know whether Jesus knew the scriptures in Hebrew or Greek or an Aramaic targum, but it should be borne in mind that nowhere in LXX is the expression υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου governed by the definite article.) These four uses are as follows:-

(a) Psalm 8 asks, "What is man that you are mindful of him, or son of man that you care for him?". "Son of man" here is simply a doublet of humankind, not a title.

(b) Psalm 80 (79 in LXX) prays at verse 18 (in translation from the LXX) "May your hand rest upon the man (ἄνδρα) at your right hand, and upon the human personage (ἐπὶ υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου) whom you have made mighty for yourself." This seems to be a twofold allusion to some contemporary ruler or leader of Israel, or possibly to the nation regarded as a corporate person.

(c) Ezekiel was often addressed by God as "son of man", i.e. "man".

There is no sign that Jesus applied any of these three usages to himself.

(d) The fourth instance, Dan. 17:13 requires more detailed consideration. In a dream Daniel saw four beasts coming out of the sea, one like a lion (but with a human heart), one like a bear, one like a leopard, and a fourth a terrible creature with ten horns, and in the midst of the ten horns an eleventh which consumed three of them and had eyes like human eyes, and made war against the saints. Then thrones were set up, the Ancient of Days took his seat as judge, surrounded by a great host, and judgement was delivered against the fourth beast, who was killed and his body burnt. Then on the clouds appeared a personage in human form (ὥς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου LXX); he came to the Ancient of Days, and everlasting power over all the earth was given to him. Daniel was puzzled by this dream and asked for interpretation. He was informed that the four creatures were four kingdoms, and the eleven horns eleven kings of the fourth kingdom; the power of the fourth kingdom will be transferred to the saints (or holy ones) of the Most High, and they will reign for ever over all other kingdoms.

Two things should be observed about this chapter:-

(1) The heavenly personage mentioned in verse 13 does not bear the title "son of man"; he is merely "in human likeness", just like the supernatural visitants who touched Daniel's lips and comforted him in 10:16, 18.

(2) This heavenly personage does not belong to the world of fact. Like the beasts he is merely a symbol designed to show that the saints of the Most High (presumably the faithful Jews persecuted by Antiochus Epiphanes⁶) are as superior to the kingdoms of the world as humanity is to the animals. The kingdom and the saints are in the world of reality; the beasts and the human personage are only symbolic dream-figures. The human figure is not the leader or saviour of the people, only their image.

Many scholars have contended that Jesus, meditating on this vision, saw in the heavenly personage a prophecy of himself, and therefore converted the words of his description ("in human likeness") into a title "the Son of Man". For four reasons this contention seems unlikely:-

(a) As shown above, the Danielic personage does not bear the title "the Son of Man"; he is merely described as "in human likeness".

⁶ It is less likely that the ἄγγιτοι are the angelic host, for the dream is of a court of law in which the saints are given justice against the beast.

(b) He is only a symbol, not a real being.

(c) Jesus (if we may rely on the synoptic gospels as giving a generally trustworthy account of his sayings) conceived of his mission on earth as a drama in five acts - I. his preexistence⁷, II. his life of humiliation on earth, III. his sacrificial death, IV. his resurrection, and V. his final glorification. The Danielic personage is relevant only to Act V.

(d) When Jesus was addressed as Messiah it was his practice to substitute the title Son of Man, presumably to avoid the implication that he had come as a political deliverer. To represent himself as a heavenly being symbolizing and inaugurating the political rule of God's holy people over the whole earth would have encouraged rather than avoided this misunderstanding.

Other scholars - e.g. C.F.D. Moule and Morna Hooker⁸ - have invited us to think of Jesus as meditating on the reality of Daniel 7 - the saints of the Most High - and seeing in himself the leader of a people who, like these saints, would go through suffering and then be vindicated by God. Perhaps Jesus did think of himself and his people in that way; but if that is really so it is not clear why he chose the Son of Man as his title for that purpose, for the human personage in 7:13 is neither identified with his people in any real sense, nor is he their pioneer or champion or leader. Moreover (as will be suggested in the next section of this article) Jesus seems to have conceived of himself as the champion of the whole human race rather than merely of persecuted Jews.

It may be objected that Jesus quoted the language of Dan.7:13 when referring to his final glorification as Son of Man in Mark 13:26 and 14:62. This is certainly true of 13:26, where Jesus' words are a conflation of Dan 7:13 and Psalm 110. The version in Luke (22:69) is quite different, quoting only Psalm 110, and it is doubtful if any of the Gospels reports the actual words of Jesus' answer to the High Priest. The similar reference at Mark 8:38 to the future glory of the Son of Man quotes not Daniel but Zech.14:5. However, let it be conceded that Jesus did sometimes use the language of Dan.7:13 when referring to his future glory. It does not follow that it was from that text in Daniel that he took the title "The Son of Man". It is much more likely that

⁷ His claim to pre-existence may be inferred from the numerous sayings in which he claimed to have come, or to have been sent. The words "on earth" in Mark 2:10 imply that he had power in heaven too.

⁸ Text and Interpretation (see note 5 above) 166-68.

having devised for himself the title "Son of Man" (which is not to be found totidem verbis anywhere in the OT), he occasionally used the language of Dan.7:13 to refer to Act V of his drama, lifting it out of its context in typical rabbinic fashion.

V. What then did Jesus mean by the title?

On one view, this question should not be asked, because the title was not meaningful but was merely a code expression, a cover phrase which enabled Jesus to claim to be Messiah without doing so in such an explicit fashion as to fall foul of the Roman authorities and risk being silenced or put to death before his time was ripe. It seems, however, unlikely that Jesus would have chosen a title that had no meaning at all. Some attempt can be made to guess why he chose to call himself the Son of Man from the following three considerations:-

(1) Philologically, the odd expression $\acute{o} \upsilon \iota \delta \varsigma \tau \omicron \upsilon \tau \acute{o} \upsilon \alpha \nu \theta \rho \omega \pi \omicron \upsilon$ seems to mean "the human being", the Man par excellence, the focal point of the human race in its relation to God.

(2) A pointer to the true meaning can be found in Mark 2:28. This text is often misunderstood. Some think the essential point is in verse 27 - "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the "Sabbath". and verse 28 only confirms it; this is no doubt why Matthew and Luke have nothing corresponding to 28. Others think that Jesus meant only that mankind is lord of the Sabbath, and originally the saying was not about the Son of Man, but was a statement that the sons of men are lords of the Sabbath. These views miss the point of the word "therefore" at the beginning of 28. Verse 27 is not the culmination of the argument: it is merely a quotation of a traditional saying found also in the Talmud. The culmination of the argument is in verse 28 - an a fortiori inference from the combination of verse 27 and Jesus' title. If, as the proverb says, the Sabbath was made for man a fortiori the Son of Man, the leader of the human race, is master of the Sabbath.

(3) Another pointer can be found in Matt. 25:31-46. This is a discourse about what will happen when the Son of Man comes in his glory. At other times Jesus had identified himself with his special people ("He who receives you receives me"), but here he is identified with the whole human race, so that whoever does an act of charity to any person whatsoever does it to the Son of Man, and anyone who neglects to do such an act to any person whatsoever neglects to do it to the Son of Man.

If this evidence seems somewhat meagre, this is because of the nature of Jesus' method of speaking. It was his manner to be enigmatic about his

person and not make claims for himself directly. This comes out with special clarity in Mark's gospel. Instead of directly claiming to be the Son of God he told the parable of the vineyard (12:1-11), the obvious implication of which is that Jesus is God's Son. Instead of claiming to be both Messiah and lord of David, he set a problem about Psalm 110 which has no apparent solution unless that claim were true (12:25-37). On another occasion instead of directly claiming to be God incarnate, he said to the man who addressed him as "good teacher", "Why do you call me good? Only God deserves that appellation", meaning "Take care: you have unwittingly addressed me as God" (10:17-18). According to Mark (4:11-12) Jesus spoke in parables so that only those who really wanted to know the truth would discover it. It would fit into this picture if Jesus described himself as the Son of Man so that the casual hearer would think it merely a rather odd periphrasis for himself, but those who really wanted to know what he had come into the world for could discover a deeper meaning. As Matthew Black wrote as long ago as 1949 (Exp.T. LX pp.32-33), "No term was more fitted both to conceal, and yet at the same time to reveal to those who had ears to hear, the Son of Man's real identity."

The question may be asked, in conclusion, why the early church made so little use of the title Son of Man. It was not included in any authoritative statement of doctrine or in any liturgical formula. The following reasons may be suggested :-

(a) The title Son of Man was not meaningful either to Jews or to Gentiles. When presenting the gospel to Jews, the Christians found it easier to proclaim Jesus as the promised Messiah, while Gentiles would find it easier to understand Jesus as the Lord or Son of God than under the obscure semitism "the Son of Man".

(b) The expression Son of Man was not meaningful even to Christians. The followers of Jesus failed to penetrate into the deeper meaning which he gave to the title.

(c) Insofar as the Christians knew of the title, it seemed to them to overstress Jesus' humanity. The important thing in the early years of the church was to acknowledge and proclaim Jesus as Lord, Son of God, even as the incarnation of God himself. To call him Son of Man would seem to contradict this. That is no doubt why the Epistle of Barnabas (12:10) invited its readers to "consider again Jesus, not Son of Man but Son of God, manifest in the flesh", and pointed out (12:11) that in Psalm 110 David calls him Lord, not Son.

Some Reflections on Humour in Scripture and Otherwise.

E.A Russell

Is there something called "humour" in scripture? The matter gives rise to some debate. There are those who would maintain e.g., that the life of Jesus and his words were characteristically serious with little sign of the reaction to life which we call "humour"¹. It is also claimed that the very nature of the NT must be sober, concerned as it is with the repentance brought about by the Holy Spirit. Sin becomes a grave business. Humour can find no room in it. "It belongs to its very nature for the NT not to be a book of humour: it is the book of fulfilment, the witness of the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ who through the thoroughly serious act of repentance brings about complete joy and freedom"²

On the other hand there are those who maintain that humour occurs throughout the Testaments. One scholar, in a book entitled Le Rire de Dieu has claimed that "God, in the person and work of Christ, has ridiculed the 'powers'... that cause man in his arrogance and mockery to set himself against God³." Bultmann although he does concede the existence of Christian humour denies that such is to be found in the NT⁴.

Mark Twain, otherwise Samuel Langhorne Clemens, in his book New

¹ Cf Jacob Jónssen, Humour and Irony in the NT (Reykjavik, 1965), 12; this paper is indebted to Dr Jónssen's work and the material it makes available.

² Cf Hans von Campenhausen, Christentum und Humor. ThRund, Neue Folge 27, Heft 1 (Tübingen, 1961), 76; the German text (Jónssen, *ibid.* 13) runs: "Dass das NT kein humoristisches Buch ist, folgt aus seinem Wesen; das Buch der Erfüllung zu sein, das Zeugnis von der Kraft des Heiligen Geistes Christi, der mit dem vollkommenen Ernst der Umkehr auch die vollkommene Freude und Freiheit bewirkt."

³ *Ibid* 13; the scholar is René Voeltzel, Le Rire de Dieu (Strassburg, 1955) "Dieu a ainsi en la personne et l'oeuvre du Christ, ridiculisé les 'puissances' qui se représentent toutes les divinités négatives entraînant l'homme à se dresser, arrogant et moqueur, contre Dieu."

⁴ R Bultmann, Das Christentum als Orientalische und Abendländische Religion. (1949, Glauben u. Verstehen II), Tübingen, 1952, *Ibid* 13.

Pilgrim's Progress, claims that there is only one facetious remark in scripture, the phrase in Acts: "The street which is called Straight", which he understands as "the street which is supposed to be straight!" Unhappily for his claim that it was the only facetious remark in scripture, most modern translators translate it "go to Straight Street."⁵ That it should be seen as the only comical remark in scripture does indicate a fairly general attitude fostered by centuries of reverence for the sacred text, that it is irreverent or blasphemous to suggest humour in such a sacred writing. It is so easy for people to forget that the writings of scripture were human writings by living people of flesh and blood as we are. Were they in their writings completely lacking in humour? Or is it wrong to expect humour to emerge in a totally serious writing?

We are not at this point identifying humour with joy though a joyous spirit and a humorous spirit are surely not unrelated. Listen e.g. to the words: "When I think upon my God, my heart is so full of joy that the notes dance and leap from my pen." They are the words of the composer and musician, Franz Josef Haydn. Such a spirit of joy is not far from laughter and humour. It was a certain Rabbi Baroka who reflected much of the spirit of Judaism when he wrote: "A clown may be the first in the kingdom of heaven if he has helped to lessen the sadness of the human heart." And what about the prophet who tells us that "The mountains and the hills break before us into singing and all the trees of the field clap their hands."

Laughter and humour are members of the same family. Hilaire Belloc expressed the relationship very well when he declared: "Genuine laughter is the physical effect produced in a rational being by what strikes his immortal soul as being damned funny." Luther had a remarkable sense of fun. When he was in Coburg castle in Bavaria, he consoled himself by writing humorous letters to his friends. At one time he said: "If you're not allowed to laugh in heaven I don't want to go there."

But if it is conceded that it would not be out of place to find humour in scripture, this is not to deny that scripture has primarily to do with matters of serious moment e.g. salvation, forgiveness, life after death. It is not to deny that the most solemn event in all history for us is the crucifixion of Jesus, that he is "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." On the other hand it is also true that we live in the light of the resurrection, in the era of hope and inexpressible joy. There is nothing fundamentally sad about the position of

⁵ Acts 9:11.

a church where "mouths have been filled with laughter and... tongues with singing."

But, we may ask, what is humour? What is it that makes a person burst into laughter, the physical response to something seen or heard? Another person in the same situation might not laugh at all. What constitutes the risible for one person may leave another quite unmoved. The attempt to define humour, to pin down its precise nature immediately discovers just how elusive such a definition is. "The quality of humour shares in the mystery which attaches to all forms of human emotion. In its genuine manifestation it is as spontaneous as laughter and as inexplicable. It mocks all attempts at definition. We can 'see' it and possess it, and enjoy it, but cannot say with definiteness what it is." Someone has calculated that there are some eighty theories as to what constitutes humour⁶.

One scholar suggests that behind every humorous or comical expression lies the attempt to express the ludicrous⁷ i.e. something which expresses what is absurd, or crazy, incongruous, ridiculous or preposterous. An example may be taken from a home-help who had a wonderful way with words. The man of the house used to come in in a breezy fashion. She described his rather rushed entry into the house: "Mr So-and-so comes in like a Toronto." She wanted to say of course that he came in like a tornado which is what the hearer expected. That she was confused and blissfully unconscious of her gaffe creates what is ludicrous. It arises out of the woman's ignorance and evokes laughter.

Humour and Scripture

In Genesis, we are told that Abraham laughed. He was informed that his ninety-year-old barren wife was to bear a son. It was utterly contrary to ordinary expectation. He laughed because it was absurd. Sarah too joined in the laughter. Abraham and Sarah were, in effect, saying "God is having a joke at our expense" (17:17; 18:12). A later interpretation gave a sober interpretation that Abraham did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief (Romans 4:20).

⁶ E Berger, Laughter and Sense of Humour. (New York, 1956), cited in Jonssen, 16.

⁷ So Carritt, The Theory of Beauty. (London, 1949) 333 cited in Jonssen, 17.

Another seeming impossibility gave rise to mocking laughter. This is the story of the young, untried David facing up to the contest with Goliath. We are told that the giant mocked and derided him, a mere strip of a boy prepared to tackle the unequal contest. The whole contest was an absurdity. Again, in Luke's gospel, when Jesus entered Jairus' house where his daughter had died, Jesus denied that she was dead. The mourners laughed him to scorn. They had seen too many corpses to be in doubt. The idea of the daughter being alive was so unreal, so against all the probabilities, they found it preposterous.

Humour is often linked with "wit" in a biblical context. "Wit" has been defined as "the [power of giving sudden intellectual pleasure by] unexpected combining or contrasting of previously unconnected ideas or expressions.⁸" We may note the word "sudden". It is often noted that the people described as "witty" have an amazingly quick perception and response.

In scripture especially the OT we have an abundance of wordplays, estimated by one writer at five hundred. It is not necessary to think of puns in a modern way. Biblical humour has for its background an ancient and oriental society whose forms of humour might not be immediately clear to us. Whether translation alone will ever uncover the hidden thrust can be uncertain. One thing is certain: biblical writers are fond of wordplays, intended presumably as expressions of wit⁹. Oddly they occur not only in humorous contexts but in passages linked up with judgement. Do we have here an ancient view that where words can form a wordplay it has to be taken seriously? Do wordplays assume a greater significance for them than they do for us, just as numerals might do?

In Genesis 2:7 we find the words:

Then the Lord God formed man (adham אָדָם) from the dust of the ground (adhamah אֲדָמָה)

Thus the stress lies on the earthly and probably the transient and mortal nature of man. It is poking fun at human arrogance and pride, all too petty that it is?

Another wordplay brings out the close relationship of man and woman (Gen.2:23)

This at last is bone of my bone

⁸ The Concise Oxford Dictionary. New edition, on "Wit".

⁹ Cf W F Stinespring, art, "Humour" IDB, 1962.

And flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman (ishah אִשָּׁה)

Because she was taken out of man. (ish וּמִן הָאָדָם)

Thus the close relationship of man and woman is brought out but is it meant to be taken seriously? Modern man would look on this account as absurd. Some indeed see it as a deliberate attempt to downgrade woman, perhaps someone who had suffered at the hands of "the monstrous regiment of women!"

The story of the Garden of Eden, given in a parabolic form enshrines within it a profound understanding of God, of creation, of man, his guilt and responsibility. The account is given with rare simplicity. We have a picture of the Almighty God walking in the garden, who has to say to Adam, "Adam, where are you?" He has to make garments for Adam and his wife - an emphasis on their utter dependence. Such a portrait of the Almighty God having to look for Adam and Eve has a simplicity and, to us, a touch of humour about it. These poor, puny creatures, attempting the impossible, escaping God and, on the other hand, the Almighty God spoken of in very human terms.

One example of wordplay is especially striking. It is found in the prophet Isaiah (5:7). It runs:

He looked for justice (mishpat מִשְׁפָּט)

And, behold, bloodshed (mispah מִשְׁפַּח).

For righteousness (sidhaquah צִדְקָה)

And behold a cry (tsaqah צָעַק).

The verse gives us two wordplays, mishpat and mispah, sidhaquah and tsaqah¹⁰. The antithetic parallelism shows the careful construction, intended to drive home the sin of Israel. Here we have "humour" of a most solemn kind, seen as juxtaposition of a divine kind. One translation has it:

He expected them to do what was good.

But instead they committed murder,

He expected them to do what was right

But their victims cried for justice (TEV).

An interesting example, more ironical than humorous, is to be found in Hosea 13:10 where the Lord inquires of faithless Israel, "Where now is your king to save you?" It is a reference to King Hoshea who reigned from 732 BCE to 724 BCE and whose kingship is being removed. The reference appears to be

¹⁰ *Ibid*

ironical. Hoshea means "Yahweh saves." (Contrast Matt.1:21)

Many other examples can be found¹¹. The writer of Ecclesiastes insists that "for everything there is a season... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance," (3:1,4) "I know", he declares, "that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live." (3:12) Is there a hedonistic touch about this, entertainment, fun and laughter, humour and its relatives? And is there a sigh of the over-worked student, perhaps not meant to be taken seriously, but often used in jocular fashion in the sentence: "of making many books there is no end and much study is a weariness of the flesh." (12:12b)

But it is to another writing of the so-called "Wisdom Literature" we turn where we have what some might describe as "wisecracks". the matter of idleness is delightfully and vividly described:

A little sleep, a little drowsiness,
A little folding of the arms to lie back
And poverty comes like a vagrant
And like a beggar dearth. (Proverbs 6:10,11; 24:33).

And what about the following:

The door turns on its hinges.
The idler on his bed.
Into the dish the idler dips his hand

But is too tired to bring it back to his mouth. (Ibid. 26:14f; cf 19:23)

We cannot miss the sarcasm in this comic portrayal. The writer appears to speak from his own sad experience when he writes:

Better the corner of a roof to live on
Than a house shared with a quarrelsome woman (21:9)

And what about the scathing sentence:

A golden ring in the snout of a pig
Is a lovely woman who lacks discretion. (11.22)?

Is there a note of despair in the following:

A continual dripping on a rainy day
And a contentious woman are alike;
To restrain her is to restrain the wind
Or grasp oil in his right hand. (27:15,16)?

We can hardly miss the impact and the impossibility in the expressive imagery!

¹¹ *ibid*

But the writer is by no means chauvinistic. He turns to deal with men, and quarrelsome men at that:

As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire

So is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife (26:21)

And what of this sweeping incitement of the roving eye of the greedy man:

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied

And never satisfied are the eyes of man (27:20)?

Discipline within the family is a regular theme in the wisdom literature but especially amusing is the following:

Do not be chary of correcting a child

A stroke of the cane is not likely to be fatal (23:13)

The theme of self-control is given an unusual and entertaining expression:

If you have been foolish enough to fly into a passion

and now have second thoughts, lay your hand on your lips.

For by churning the milk you produce butter,

By wringing the nose you produce blood

And by whipping up anger you produce strife (30:33)

We have a comical and entertaining comparison in which a king finds himself in strange company.

There are three things of stately tread;

Four indeed of stately walk.

The lion bravest of all beasts,

He will draw back from nothing,

A vigorous cock, a he-goat

And a king when he harangues his people. (30:29-31)

The association of lion, cock and he-goat with a king suggest little that can be accepted as complimentary to his royal highness!

One further illustration from Proverbs and this to do with the garrulous:

You see someone too ready of speech?

There is more to be hoped for from a fool. (29:20)

Jewish Humour in the Early Christian Period¹²

It is worth stressing that Jesus was a Jew, brought up probably in a strict Jewish home and open to the emphases of his tradition.

When we examine the rabbinic traditions as evidenced in the Mishnah and Talmud, we find many humorous illustrations, not generally what we find in the teachings of Jesus but serving to show that the comic sense

¹² Cf Jónssen, op.cit. chapter V, 51-89.

could very suitably be found there. We propose to give some examples.

We are told that Rabbi Gamaliel, in the course of a lecture expresses the view that "Woman is destined to bear every day." He quoted in support the saying "The woman conceives and bear simultaneously." One of his students found the idea preposterous and said so. The Rabbi then showed him a hen to prove that in this world a similar thing could take place. The key to the riddle is to understand "woman" as generally "female".¹³

Other teachers give us a frolicsome view of God without any hint of awkwardness¹⁴.

In the world to come God will lead the dance with the righteous, the righteous on one side and the righteous on the other and God in their midst, and they will dance before him with vigour and they will point their finger and say: This God is our God for ever and ever. He will lead us in this world and the world to come.

Another story verges on the irreverent. In it Moses goes up to heaven and finds God weaving crowns for the letters of the law, but Moses gives no greeting. God said to Moses: "Do men give no greeting in your city?" Moses replied: "Does a slave greet his master?" God replied; "You ought to have wished me success." Then Moses said: "May the power of the Lord be great, according as Thou hast spoken."¹⁵

Another tells of a Rabbi who went to a certain place where men complained: "The mice eat our grain." The Rabbi wove a spell on the mice with the result the mice came together and squeaked. He said to the men gathered, " Do you know what they say?" They replied, "No." The Rabbi rejoined, "They say the grain has not been properly tithed."¹⁶

Another quaint story tells of a certain Rabbi who had run across a Sadducee who annoyed him continually by giving his interpretation of texts. Now it was generally believed that, at a certain hour of the morning, the comb of a cock would change in a particular way and any curse pronounced at that

¹³ *Ibid.* 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid* 53f.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*54

¹⁶ *Ibid* 60

time would be specially powerful. One day the rabbi took a cock and placed it between the legs of his bed and watched it. He thought: when the cock's comb changes, I will curse this heretic Sadducee. But, to his dismay, when the moment arrived he was asleep! The Rabbi accepted this as a sign that he and his students should not act in such a way.¹⁷

The Rabbis give us a quotable story about a talkative woman and her son. On a Sabbath when his mother was especially tiresome he reminded his mother that it was a day of rest.¹⁸

The Humour of Jesus

When we turn to the sayings of Jesus, we find that very often they belong to a floating tradition and the original context is well and truly lost. This meant that whether it be the oral tradition or that of the Gospel writers, a context often had to be devised. The so-called Sermon on the Mount, for example, is made up of a collection of sayings which Matthew has put in order for teaching purposes.

What we seek for in approaching the sayings of Jesus is the preparedness not only to look seriously as is usual but to inquire whether there is a real vein of humour all too often concealed.

The saying, "You are the salt of the earth" while directed to the disciples, sets them in the context of the listening crowds.

The saying of course has several traditional explanations: preserving what is good for the world; being different from the world imparting flavour to life. But when Jesus goes on to say: "if the salt has lost its flavour it is

¹⁷ *Ibid* 62

¹⁸ This collection of strange, mythical stories which are intended to instruct may have little appeal to the modern reader. Jewish humour including the Talmudic has been described as "self-derogatory" and "self-irony". It is important to remember that in early times, there was no clear distinction between the religious and the secular. "Everything belonged to God, and everything was, in a way, religious, even the most unimportant things of daily life and surroundings. The consequences of this way of thinking are to be found in two different traits of Hebrew humour. Firstly, practically anything, even the strange and ridiculous, would be used for the benefit of religious education. Secondly, humour itself was dependent on the judgement of religious authorities" *Ibid* 85,86

good for nothing", he leaves himself open to the charge of having made a mistake. Everyone knows that salt cannot lose its flavour. But the Greek word for "losing flavour" (μωρανθή) strictly means "become foolish". In the context of wisdom sayings Jesus is highlighting the opposite, folly and thus speaks of the fool who has nothing good to contribute to life. Here is one example among many where Jesus makes an incredible hypothesis to drive home his point.

Another example is the hypothesis that any sane person would put a lamp under a bushel. But such a humorous picture of stupidity helps to underline the folly of the disciple of Jesus who refuses to bear witness (Mt. 5:15).

In the context of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees, the following saying must be considered ironical:

Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:20)

Jesus is dealing with the necessity of absolute truthfulness in the passage on oaths in the course of which he says:

Do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair black or white (5:36).

A certain rabbi by name Alexandrai declared that even if all the nations of the world were gathered together to make the wing of a raven white they would not succeed. Jesus similarly makes such a task seem ridiculous in order to emphasise man's helplessness.

The vexed question of non-provocation is made all the more absurd and heightens the impact of what Jesus says:

If someone takes your shirt (χιτῶν)
let him have your cloak as well (ἱμῶτιον)

In other words get rid of the clothes you have. Stand unclothed before the final judge.

The unpopular Romans had the right to press-gang members of the occupied country if necessary. The thought of going two miles instead of the required one is quite grotesque and thus adds tremendous impact to what Jesus says on reconciliation.

It is notable that the Jesus tradition is full of memorable sayings, sayings easily remembered. Indeed it is difficult to find a saying of Jesus that is not striking. Again and again he gives us pictures, not things that are abstract or theoretical. He is a master of the ridiculous or the absurd, not for its own sake, but bound up with his commitment to the kingdom of God or

God's sovereign rule.

On the matter of sitting in judgement on others, the censorious spirit, Jesus' use of the ridiculous may derive from a Palestinian proverb which Jesus freely employs to drive home his point. Here again we have the gross exaggerations which are typical of his personal style.

Why do you look at the speck of dust in your brother's eye with never a thought for the great plank in your own? (Mt. 7:3).

In the Talmudic literature, the saying is used where two students of the rabbi are criticising one another. One says "Take out the splinter from your eye." The other replies, "And what about the plank in your own?"

Later on in Matthew we have another illustration of what G.K.Chesterton describes as the "gigantesque" quality of Jesus' illustration.

It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Mt 19:24)

This saying proved too absurd for some scribes who changed "camel" (καμήλος) into "cable" (κάμλος) or those commentators who suggested the "needle's eye" was the name of a small wicket-gate in Jerusalem. The saying is apparently proverbial. It is found in the Talmud in relation to highly intelligent and subtle rabbinic scholars in a place called Pumbeditha. The saying runs: "Perhaps you are from Pumbeditha where they draw an elephant through the eye of the needle." The impact of Jesus' hyperbole shows the stringent demand associated with entry into the fellowship of the rule of God given edge by the use of the absurd.

We could multiply instances in the sayings of Jesus that have to do with the absurd, e.g. a father giving a child a stone instead of bread or a snake when he asks for fish (7:9,10); and what about those who try to gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles (7:16,17) or the folly of the simpleton who built his house on sand. Here is folly to the point of idiocy contrasting with what is wise or sensible. The folly is laughable and, more important perhaps, for an illiterate audience, unforgettable.

Some final thoughts

How often do we find the humour of Jesus dwelt on in the average sermon or Bible-Class? Have we so solemnized Jesus that we have squeezed out his humanity and his joyous outlook, and, if we may permit ourselves to say it, his sense of fun?

We are of course children of the Reformation and have an incalcu-

lable debt to our Fathers. But it is common knowledge that they imparted an austerity and severity to the faith and, to some extent, created an equally austere and joyless Jesus.

Before their time there was widespread use of comedy alongside devout religion, especially in the Greek Orthodox Church. They had what were called "Holy Fools". From the fourteenth century to the seventeenth no less than twenty-six were canonised as saints¹⁹. A Jewish woman writer traces the emergence of Jewish humour from the disparity between the prophetic role of the Jews as the chosen people and the harsh realities. She asserts that "The comic alone is able to give us strength to bear the tragedy of existence."²⁰

To end with we can do no better than quote from Reid's splendid article on humour in Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics:

The sense of humour is universally desired and is highly valued. No one will readily acknowledge that he does not have it. Without it man is scarcely human. It is a means of self-criticism, and saves us from the folly of self-importance and the sin of self-righteousness... Humour tends to keep the heart young. As a criticism of social life and character it is invincible and invaluable. Humour is the inveterate foe of convention, and loves to make fun of Mrs Grundy and all who follow in her train... It adds a joy to life without which life would be dull and poor. It is a relaxation and a delight to step aside for a moment from the sober, grey and solemn world, where reason and order rule, into a realm where the whimsical, the incongruous and the absurd hold sway and summon us to laughter and to play. Some of the world's greatest benefactors have been its humorists. They brighten with a touch of fun the horizon of life which is often dark and dismal.

I have no doubt whatever that Jesus would wholly identify with such sentiments!

Belfast

E A Russell

¹⁹ Cf Joseph W. Bastien, Enc.Brit 1980(?) Art "Humour".

²⁰ *Ibid* 520

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J. C. McCullough

For reasons of space we have divided the Index into two parts. The first part which is published in this issue deals with Volumes 1-6 and is a List of Authors of articles, Book Reviews and Books Reviewed. The second part, to be published January 1992, will consist of an Author Index of Volumes 7-13 together with a short Title Index for Volumes 1-13. We offer this index as a tribute to the many contributors of articles and book reviews throughout the history of Irish Biblical Studies but above all as in appreciation of the very hard work of Rev. Professor E. A. Russell who founded the Journal and carefully nurtured it throughout the first 11 years of its publication.

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J. C. McCullough

BOOK REVIEWS

Andre LaCocque, The Feminine Unconventional, Fortress Press, 1990. pp. 144 + xvi.

LaCocque offers a literary study of four compositions from both biblical and extrabiblical Jewish traditions: the books of Susanna, Judith, Esther, and Ruth. The four narratives are linked, not only by the centrality of their female characters, but also, in LeCocque's reading, by their origins in the post-exilic, Second temple period, when Israel, under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, struggled to recover and then defend a sense of restored and unassailable identity. It is Lacocque's conviction that these four narratives belong to a tradition of subversive literature, which grew up in this climate as a strong form of protest against the prevailing exclusive and self-protective ideology of Israel's leaders. In particular, in response to the demand of the Jewish leadership that all Jewish men divorce their foreign wives, these four narrative affirmed with conviction and passion that the choices and lives of women had been decisive in the salvation history of Israel, and precisely because they had been open to the inspired, unconventional movement of the Spirit in situations where traditional, institutional responses had shown themselves to be barren.

LaCocque presents a reading of these four narratives which is sensitive and attentive to detail, respecting each composition both as an internally coherent piece in its own right, and as a story belonging to a much wider tradition of Jewish writing. In each case, the text is not first of all taken apart for study, but rather heard, with all the echoes of its many voices. Thus, the surprising message of the book of Ruth is not simply that of a foreign woman who chooses to keep faith with her Israelite mother-in-law. It is that a woman from Moab, a place which in Israel's tradition was made to represent corruption and destruction, provides precisely that model of fidelity for Israel which not only made possible the birth of David, but which now calls into question any subsequent understanding of faithfulness which is any less inclusive, large and hopeful.

In short, the reading of these four narratives offered by LaCocque is for the most part provocative and fresh. At the same time, however, there are some striking weaknesses in his method, which shows somewhat less sensitivity to the voices of current women's scholarship than to the voices of the text. The chapter on "The Status of Women in the Ancient Near East and in Israel" in particular is piecemeal and often confusing. The terms "female" and "feminine" appear to be used interchangeably, the brief discussion of

patriarchy in Israel is so sketchy as to be of little usefulness, the claim that the Biblical understanding of gender is relational is done scant justice, and the discussion of the Genesis creation narratives is simply confusing (a fact which is especially surprising to the reader since LaCocque draws elsewhere on the insights of Phyllis Trible's, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality). This chapter therefore makes very frustrating reading.

However, for the reader willing to clear a way through this initial chapter to the essays on Susanna, Judith, Esther and Ruth themselves, there are exciting possibilities for further reflection. Larger questions emerge from LaCocque's ability to honour the nuances of each narrative. For example, what happens when a faith community becomes largely "scribal" (Susanna), that is, focuses on interpretation of the inspired traditions of the past, rather than on the possibility of receiving inspiration in the present? And if such a community has been at least partially built on patriarchal foundations, what happens to its women in particular? Or again, does loyalty to the truth of one's own experience (Esther) necessarily further the ultimate good of the whole community? And so on. These are questions of importance for faith communities everywhere, and not least for the churches here in Ireland, and it is a tribute to LaCocque that his careful and sensitive reading of these four narrative texts yields such timely and thought-provoking results.

Katherine P Meyer

Claus Westermann, The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1991. n/p.

Westermann's approach to the parables is somewhat unusual. Indeed the title of this book is misleading, for the first hundred and fifty pages are entirely devoted to a survey of comparisons in the Old Testament, leaving only fifty pages for the parables of Jesus. Of these remaining pages, twenty-seven are devoted to a review of the conclusions of various scholars on the parables. However, the survey of Old Testament comparisons has value as a work of reference.

But how does Westermann define a comparison? An event in one sphere is juxtaposed with an event in another sphere. The intention of this juxtaposition is in each case clear from the context. For example, in Micah 2:3 judgment is compared with a yoke laid on the people: "from which you cannot remove your necks and you shall not walk haughtily".

Again in Jeremiah 7:11 the temple of God is compared to a den of robbers: "Do you think this house, this house which bears my name, is a

robbers' cave?".

Moreover the psalmist acknowledges God who puts the faithful to the test by comparison with the essayer's fire: "For thou, O God, has put us to the proof and refined us like silver." (66:10).

It follows that a comparison may be brief as in Job 19:10: "(God) has uprooted my hope like a tree." or a comparison can be so long that it becomes a story or parable like the song of the vineyard in Isaiah 5. A parable is an extended comparison.

Westermann insists that comparisons must not be dismissed as mere imagery or metaphor, although they often contain metaphors. Comparisons are a most powerful means of expression. Indeed Westermann shows how the intensive use of comparisons in Job make it the one book in all religious literature which subjects God to the greatest accusation.

Westermann's conclusions about Old Testament comparisons are enlightening. He shows that comparisons occur only in dialogical texts, ie. prophetic oracles and psalms. The function of comparisons is always derived from their context; therefore they cannot be described as mere imagery or illustration. In both the comparisons of the Old Testament and the parables of Jesus one process, perhaps the dealing of God with humanity, is juxtaposed with another process, usually an everyday occurrence in nature or human behaviour; e.g. "As a father pities his children" (Ps. 103) or "there was once a judge ... and in the same town ... a widow" (Luke 18: 1-8). The reader (or hearer) is then compelled to view the vivid comparison with its divine and earthly elements and decide whether or not it tells the truth.

However, when he turns from the Old Testament to the parables of Jesus, Westermann's work becomes somewhat unsatisfactory. He insists that the parables must be sorted into groups, but his headings (parables of growth; announcement of judgement; stories involving sudden change; instruction for present action) seem no more and no less satisfactory than the classification of parables attempted by his predecessors in this field. It is also surprising after such an exhaustive survey of Old Testament comparisons that the possibility of Jesus' parables being based on Old Testament themes is not mentioned. Surely the lost sheep has its origins in the careless shepherds of Ezekiel 34 and the grain of mustard seed in the noble cedar where all kinds of birds roost in Ezekiel 17: 22-24?

Overall the value of this book lies less in its conclusions about the parables of Jesus and more in what it demonstrates about the use of comparisons in the prophets and psalms.

Denis Campbell

Jean Pierre Ruiz, Ezekiel in the Apocalypses: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17-19:10, Verlag Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1989. pp. 607 + xx.

Jean Pierre Ruiz's study of Rev. 16:7-19:10 is a revised version of his doctoral thesis which considers the use of the Old Testament, particularly Ezekiel, in the Christian Apocalypse. In a very thorough study Ruiz affirms that "John swallowed Ezekiel's scroll in order to write one of his own" (p.527).

The book is in three parts, followed by a concluding summary. Part one offers a critical examination and appraisal of literature dealing with the extent of the use of the Old Testament and particularly Ezekiel in Revelation. Ruiz considers two major commentaries which initially focused attention upon this theme (Swete, Charles), plus a number of related studies (Schlatter, Boismard, Vanhoye, Beale and Vogelgesang). Part two deals with the "hermeneutical imperatives", namely, the exhortations of 1:2; 22:7; the formulas included in the letters (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 13:9) and calls to pay special attention to the revelation being imparted (13:18; 17:9). These are never addressed to outsiders and "guide the privileged setting of the Churches' liturgical assembly". (p.iii) Part three, to which all the rest has been leading, is an analysis of the text of Rev. 16:17-19:10, chosen not only because of the vividness and richness of its metaphors, but as a window to the strategy of John in the Apocalypse as a whole.

Ruiz correctly interprets the imagery of the Apocalypse as relating particularly to John's own day. The Roman imperial power, including the imperial cult, which threatened the distinctive identity and survival of the Christian communities of Asia Minor, is unmasked as the Great Prostitute Babylon. His study particularly highlights the large scale reappropriation by John of prophetic language from Ezekiel 16, 23, 26-28. Jeremiah 50--51 and Daniel 7.

Ruiz demonstrates that this section of the Christian Apocalypse can be read as a unity, introduced by and embraced within the outpouring of the seventh bowl (16:17-21). This unity is built around the linked motifs of the Prostitute, the Beast and Babylon the Great. Here we find a message which is often recognisably Ezekielian although that work is never explicitly cited as such. While Ruiz rules out any lectionary hypothesis regarding Ezekiel and Revelation (see M.D.Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies", NTS 27(1981), 342-367), he does leave us with the intriguing possibility that the outline of Ezekiel's work exerted influences on the organization of John's Apocalypse. He claims that in Revelation we find the

"recontextualization" (p.526) of Old Testament and Ezekielian metaphors from the prophetic tradition. The Apocalypse is not written as a distillation of oral prophetic discourses, but is a consciously crafted prophetic letter framed in the Pauline epistolary style and to be read in the Christian liturgical assembly.

This is an impressive study which demonstrates the extensive use in the Christian Apocalypse of Ezekiel and other material from the Old Testament. Ruiz has shown that John's work is a carefully constructed "tract for the times" imparting a spiritual perceptive and understanding of the mystery of God in the last days (10:7), which encourages believers to endure. However, one wonders if Revelation is all about the reappropriation of material from the "Jewish Scriptures" and sometimes not about fulfilment. Again, while there is clearly a strong influence from the prophetic traditions in this section of Revelation, can we really separate these traditions from apocalyptic traditions? One should note Ruiz's reference to Swete's explanation of the high concentration of references from Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel, "those which most abound in mystical and apocalyptic elements" (p.6). Should we not rather think in terms of apocalyptically-shaped prophetic imagery within Revelation?

Hamilton Moore

Gerard F. O'Hanlon, S.J., The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar, Cambridge University Press, 1990. pp.229 + xiii. ISBN 0 521 36649 6 hardback. £30.00.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar was born in Lucerne in 1905 and died in 1988 just a few days before he was to be installed as a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. His writings on theological themes are phenomenal and include his books on Glory, Theodramatie and Theologie. Several people greatly influenced his life and work -- the Biblical Theology of Henri de Lubec and Jean Danielou and the writings of Adrienne von Speyer and Karl Barth. The two last mentioned he met while a chaplain to students at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He wrote so much that he was able to live by his income from these and as a result founded and ran the Johannes Verlag in Einsiedeln.

This fine book of G. O'Hanlon was originally a Ph.D. Thesis for Queen's University, Belfast. After acceptance it was sent to Balthasar who regarded it as one of the best expositions of his work to date. The book focusses on one main theme: can God change and, if so, how? It also, however, introduces

us to many of the others subjects of Balthasar's writings -- the suffering of God, the question of analogy and all linked to the central place and relevance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Unlike many modern writers Balthasar goes not opt for an Eastern but for a Western position on the Trinity retaining influences from the High Scholasticism of Mediaevalism which keeps him close to the main Roman Catholic tradition. O'Hanlon's work is a nuanced, sophisticated and well argued exposition which closely mirrors and conveys the same qualities in Balthasar.

The main argument of the book is that Balthasar, while retaining the traditional teaching of the Church on the unchangeableness of God, also envisages a form of "change" in God which he calls an "even-more". This is not to be seen as the same as change in creatures but as an "even-more" of the same. It can even be spoken of as an "expansion" in God or even an enrichment which in no sense alters his constancy.

Balthasar reaches his conclusions by examining four areas --Christology, Creation, Time and Eternity and the Trinity. Since God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit enters into our creation in time and suffers what happens in the economy must reflect something of the nature of God. In the relationship between the event of God's triune love and the world there is a mutuality and reciprocity so that God has something in Himself which makes this possible. His is, to take up Jüngel's phrase about Barth, "a Being in Becoming". This means an eternal movement in the Triune God by which he takes to himself our suffering and finitude in a self giving love which means an "even-more" in him. But it is, paradoxically, "even-more" the same. One can only speak tentatively and very cautiously in this way.

Jüngel uses an illustration from human love and shows that, while it has a measure of constancy, by its very nature it is enriched by its self-giving to the other. While one may question attributing a similar quality to the persons of the Trinity, nevertheless they can cautiously be spoken of as having the capacity of mutual enrichment in love while still remaining ever the same. At times this seems more like semantic hair splitting and speculation than proper theological interpretation.

In an additional chapter to the thesis O'Hanlon's excellent survey also takes in some modern writers who have a different approach. O'Hanlon is also critical, at some points, of Balthasar for his imprecision. He does, however, argue that Balthasar is right to speak of the surprises of God. Again while Balthasar's theology is biblically based, it is not necessarily a correct interpretation of Scripture at some points. In summary we can only say that Balthasar's thesis is an hypothesis. It is, in my opinion, one which, on the

evidence of the book, must be judged "not proven". This in no way lessens the significance of the many profound insights of Balthasar nor should it deter but rather encourage the reading of a very reliable exposition of a great modern Roman Catholic theologian.

J. Thompson

Blum Fred, Depth Psychology and the Healing Ministry, Arthur James 1990. pp. 146.

Why include a book with this title in a journal devoted to Biblical studies? Several reasons may be given: First, Bible scholars are increasingly profiting from insights available in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Secondly, this author has brought to his work an exceptional integration of the Jewish and Christian traditions. He was born (1914) to German Jewish parents, both of whom met their deaths at Auschwitz. On a visit there (1945) he could be helped to carry the darkness and suffering with the light to be found in Jesus the Jew. Thirdly, in the USA he mastered analytical psychology and sociology and practised there for years, especially in industrial settings. It was borne in upon him that, while depth psychology and the study of structural change in society might, indeed, be of great value, self-development demanded much more. He was led to discover this secret in the great Bible themes of The Tree of Life, The Wounded Healer, The Kingdom, The Cosmic Christ, The People of God and The Body of Christ.

In this book Blum contrasts the Medieval Period (1000 to 1500 AD) with the Post-medieval (1500 to the present time). He believes that we are now on the threshold of the "New Era", as he terms it. (By the way that is a very different concept from what is called the "New Age"!) His New Era synthesises the universal truths underlying the world views of the two earlier epochs. The "holistic therapy" set forth in this short book stresses the essentially corporate communal nature of humanity and relationships of individuals to society and to the ultimate reality, found in the Cosmic Christ, through Jesus of Nazareth. Blum has wanted to remain open to the wholesome, healing forces found through other religions, world views and disciplines. While not adopting an exclusive stance, he nevertheless confesses: "... no matter how we express the mystery, Christ is not a word like any other word, it is not a name like any other name. Christ is the Word denoting the essence of life."

Throughout his life Fred Blum considered himself a Jew, even after his Baptism and Ordination in the Church of England in 1986. True to his concept of the healing ministry as necessarily corporate, he founded a

community of healing. It is at The Abbey, near Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire. There he devoted all his time for the last ten years of his life until he died in 1990. (That work will continue under the direction of his widow and Bishop Stephen Verney.)

The five essays composing the book cannot be regarded as a systematic treatment of Christian Healing. Yet we have here an introduction to the methods he followed in the community setting:- Meditation and contemplative prayer; understanding the language of dreams and interpreting them; art and music employed as instruments of healing, together with "activation of the energy centres of the body and the healing energy in nature".

Blum's book is a fitting publication, coming at the end of a decade in which, as has been argued by leading writers on the subject, "pastoral care as a whole has shifted into the theological arena".

Should anyone wish to pursue these matters more comprehensively, two books stand out, drawing on different, prolonged experience of both study and practice: I. John Wilkinson, Health and Healing - Studies in New Testament Principles and Practice, (Handsel, 1980) where the author, a medical doctor in Kenya for many years, claims that "in the widest sense of man's wholeness, health is the main topic of the Bible. What modern man confines to the body, the Bible extends to the whole of man's being and relationships. It is only when man's being is whole and his relationships right that he can truly be described as healthy." II. Morris Maddocks: The Christian Healing Ministry, (SPCK, 1981), a comprehensive book beginning with the bible and then working the message out through the Church and in wider society.

James R Boyd